

Socio- Economic Factors and Students Retention and Completion rates in Public Secondary Schools in Kilifi County, Kenya

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Abstract

Retention and completion rates of students in schools remain one of the challenges that the government of Kenya has faced. The purpose of this paper is to examine social economic factors such as family income levels, parents' education levels, parents' occupation, family size and students' retention rates in Kilifi County. The study used descriptive research design. The sample of the study consisted of 250 respondents consisting of 200 parents and 50 head teachers. The objectives of the study were; finding out the relationship between educational background, occupation, gender, and family size of households and student retention rates. The study design was a descriptive survey design. The data was elicited by means of questionnaires, and interviews. Purposeful sampling was used in the selection of parents and head teachers. The main findings of the study were that majority of students who dropped out of school were mainly from families where parents had not attained formal education. Parents' educational and economic backgrounds were found to have a significant effect on their children's education.

Key Words: Educational Background, Occupation, Gender, Family Size, Households, Retention Rates

INTRODUCTION

Kenya has placed considerable importance on the role of education in promoting economic, political and social development since independence. Education provides the youth with the opportunities to acquire knowledge and skills necessary to advance themselves and their nation economically. Tinto (2005) points out that a nation that values and promotes the educational attainment of its citizens is a nation that is concerned with its ability to compete in the global economy. Secondary education plays a key role in providing the youth with opportunities to acquire human capital that will enable them to pursue higher education and to improve their skills leading to higher labour market productivity.

Development of education in Kenya has been marked by various challenges. These challenges include enrollment, access, retention, equity, quality and relevance in education (MoE, 2009). The government of Kenya introduced free primary education after independence and this led to a high demand for education. Student enrollment in primary and secondary schools increased from 900,000 and 30,000 in 1963 to 7.4 million and 926,149 in 2004, respectively (Government of Kenya, 2006). Even though access and enrollment has increased, high wastage and declining completion

rates, low survival levels from primary to university and low female enrolment in science and technical courses has posed a challenge in the country (MoE, 2009). From the year 2003 to 2013, 200,000 young Kenyans have been pushed out of the education system and terminated their learning at primary school level. According to Digolo (2005) the decline in enrollment and high dropout rate is most evident in districts that are affected by low income at the household level. In Tana River County, data on enrollment and completion rates is worrying. According to a survey done by UNICEF (2013), the enrollment of pupils in primary schools dropped from 21,584 in 2012 to 16,651 in 2013. The ministry of education has tried to address the challenges of retention and completion by ensuring that those who go to school complete the cycle without dropping out. However, socioeconomic factors such as family income levels, parental education levels and parents' occupation influence access and retention of students in schools.

In the analysis of how socio- economic status of the family affects the schooling of children, Kombo (2005) found out that families which are economically stable send their children to school early and hence completing school early to enter the job market. Such children love school and are retained at school because their parents are capable of providing all the necessary school requirements ranging from learning resources like books to other items outside the classroom which children love like hockey sticks and swimming clothes.

Sirin (2005) and white (1982) also argue that there is a positive relationship between the socio- economic status (SES) of parents and the child's success at school. According to these authors, children who come from families with low socio-economic status have general low educational attainment and achievements. Such children have high chances of dropping out of school than their counter- parts that come from families of high socio- economic statuses.

The education level of parents can be a motivational factor in the students' effort to learn. Students whose parents are educated are usually provided with the necessary learning resources and moral support to excel in their education. Their parents are role models to go by and even struggle to do better than them (Kombo, 2005). In the general social and social- cognitive framework (Bandura, 1986), behavior is shaped in part through observation and direct learning. In this connection, educated parents are good models which children can copy and struggle also to excel at school. Children in educated families would like to be like their parents and would work hard not to drop out of school. They would like to complete school just like their educated parents did.

Opportunities of access to education by gender vary in the country. Some cultures are biased towards women. Women relatively enjoy lower levels of education and have limited training opportunities compared to males. Muller (1990) noted that more boys than girls particularly in poor economies of Africa, Kenya included, continue to go to school and work their way up the economic ladder. Families who cannot afford to send both sons and daughters to school prefer boys because they argue that financial returns on expenditure for girls are less than boys

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between the socio economic factors of the family and students' retention rates in Tana River County. It sought:

1. To find out the relationship between educational background of the household head and students retention rates
2. To investigate the relationship between occupation of the household head and students retention rates
3. To establish the relationship between gender of the household head and students retention rates
4. To find out if there is significant relationship between family size and students retention rates.

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant relationship between educational background of the household head and students retention rates
2. There is no significant relationship between occupation of the household head and students retention rates
3. There is no significant relationship between gender of the household head and students retention rates
4. There is no significant relationship between family size and students retention rate

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted using descriptive survey design. This design is aimed at collecting data from large and small samples of population in order to examine the distribution, incidence and interaction of educational and sociological phenomena (Mmaduakonam, 1988). The population of the study comprised parents and head teachers of secondary schools in the county. The sample consisted of 250 respondents made up of 200 parents, and 50 head teachers. The instruments used for data collection was a structured questionnaire for parents, and head teachers, and documentary analysis of school records. Chi-square test was used to test the relationships between students' retention rates and educational background of the household head, occupation, gender and family size.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The presentation of the data and discussion are based on each research hypothesis. The first hypothesis of the study stated that:

H₀1: There is no significant relationship between educational background of the household head and students retention rates

To test this hypothesis, the researcher employed Chi-square test to find out whether there was a relationship between household educational background and students retention rate. Results of this analysis are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Education background of the household head and students retention rate

| No. of drop outs | Education level of household head | | | | Total | Chi-square statistics |
|------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------|-------|-----------------------|
| | No formal education | Primary education | Secondary College | University | | |
| None | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 5 | 6 |
| 1-2 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 12 | 0 | 15 |
| 3-4 | 9 | 6 | 14 | 5 | 0 | 34 |
| 5-6 | 14 | 23 | 11 | 1 | 0 | 49 |
| 7-8 | 32 | 40 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 77 |
| 9 & above | 18 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 19 |
| Total | 73 | 69 | 34 | 19 | 5 | 200 |

*Significant at $p < 0.05$ level

Results presented in Table 1 shows that there was a significant relationship between household head education level and the students' retention rates in school, $\chi^2(20, N=200) = 326.845$, $p < 0.000$. This shows that students from background where parents had no formal education or had attained primary education were more likely to drop-out of school compared to those from background where parents had attained College or University education. In accordance with the results, previous researchers established that parents with low levels of education are more likely to have children who do not attend school. If they do, they tend to drop out in greater numbers (Blick & Sahn, 2000; Brown & Park, 2002) and engage in more income generating activities than children of parents with high levels of education (Duryea, 2003; Ersado, 2005). This therefore, revealed that parental level of education was highly associated with the students' dropout rates in the school. Similarly, Noor (2001) argues that there is a direct relationship between parental level of education and children's enrolment and retention in school. This is because educated parents with high incomes are able to provide their children with a conducive home environment, necessities of school and pay for extra tuition, therefore encouraging participation of children in education since they understand the value of education and its benefit to the child. Educated parents enroll their children to good schools encourage them to study by availing relevant books/revision materials and ensuring completion of their children's education.

The second hypothesis of the study stated that:

H₀2: There is no significant relationship between occupation of the household head and students retention rates

Chi-square test was used to find out whether there was a relationship between household head occupation and students retention rates. The findings of this analysis are tabulated in Table 2.

Table 2. Occupation of the household head and students retention rate

| No. of drop outs | Occupation of the household head | | | | Total | Chi-square statistics $\chi^2=102.229$ |
|------------------|----------------------------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|-------|---|
| | Employed | Self employed | Casual worker | Not employed | | |
| None | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 6 | df =15 |
| 1-2 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 7 | 15 | |
| 3-4 | 0 | 5 | 8 | 21 | 34 | |
| 5-6 | 0 | 1 | 18 | 30 | 49 | |
| 7-8 | 0 | 0 | 25 | 52 | 77 | |
| 9 and above | 0 | 2 | 5 | 12 | 19 | Sig.=0.000 * |
| Total | 4 | 13 | 61 | 122 | 200 | |

*Significant at $p < 0.05$ level

The results of the analysis revealed that there was a significant relationship between these two variables, $\chi^2(15, N=200) = 102.229, p < 0.000$. The results showed that majority of the students dropping out of school were from families where parents were not employed or were casual workers. According to Akengo (2007), parents' occupation largely determines the level of income and the living standards. This means that household head income level had a great impact towards students' retention rates in school. Onyango (2000) observed that many Kenyans can no longer have access to education because they are unable to meet its cost. This is because of the declining incomes and escalating cost of educational materials which have made most parents unable to educate their children even though they are willing to do so. Onyango adds that most parents are impoverished trying to retain their children in school but when confronted with limited resources, to some critical level, parents particularly poor ones tend to withdraw their children from school. In addition to this, Considine and Zappala (2002) observed that children who come from families with low income level experience problems such as: low literacy level, low retention rate, problems in school behaviour and more difficulties in their studies and mostly display negative attitude towards studies and school. The implication of this is that majority of these children tend to withdraw from school and eventually engage in child labour at a very tender age.

The third hypothesis of the study stated that:

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between gender of the household head and students' retention rates

A Chi-square test was conducted to find out whether there was a relationship between gender of the household head and students retention rate. Table 3 shows results obtained.

Table 3. Gender of the household head and students retention rate

| No. of drop outs | Gender | | Total | Chi-square statistics |
|------------------|--------|--------|-------|-----------------------|
| | Male | Female | | |
| None | 4 | 2 | 6 | $\chi^2=3.017$ |
| 1-2 | 7 | 8 | 15 | |
| 3-4 | 23 | 11 | 34 | df =5 |
| 5-6 | 28 | 21 | 49 | |
| 7-8 | 41 | 36 | 77 | |
| 9 & above | 10 | 9 | 19 | Sig.=0.697 |
| Total | 113 | 87 | 200 | |

Not significant at $p < 0.05$ level

Chi-square test results presented in Table 3 showed that there was no significant relationship between gender of the household head and students retention rates in school, $\chi^2 (5, N=200) = 3.017, p < 0.697$. This implies that household head gender did not have any significant influence on students' retention rates in school. These results did not agree with the findings of the previous studies that have shown that children from single-parent or female-headed households are more likely to drop out than are children who reside in two-parent families (Pong & Ju, 2000). Similarly, Vartanian and Phillip (1999) established that the percent of female headed households are statistically significant in measuring the dropout rates of high school students.

The fourth hypothesis of the study stated that:

H₀₄: There is no significant difference between family size and students retention rates

To test this hypothesis, the researcher used Chi-square test and the results of this analysis are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Family size and students' retention rate

| No. of drop outs | Number of children | | | | Total | Chi-square statistics |
|------------------|--------------------|-----|-----|-------|-------|-----------------------|
| | 1-3 | 4-6 | 7-9 | 10-12 | | |
| None | 5 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 5 | $\chi^2=205.708$ |
| 1-2 | 0 | 2 | 12 | 1 | 0 | |
| 3-4 | 0 | 3 | 24 | 7 | 0 | df =15 |
| 5-6 | 0 | 1 | 37 | 11 | 0 | |
| 7-8 | 0 | 0 | 40 | 37 | 0 | |
| 9 and above | 0 | 0 | 6 | 13 | 0 | Sig.=0.000* |
| Total | 5 | 7 | 119 | 69 | 5 | |

*Significant at $p < 0.05$ level

As shown in Table 4, Chi-square test revealed that there was a significant relationship between family size and students retention rates in school, $\chi^2 (15, N=200) = 205.708, p < 0.000$. This shows that students from background with large family size were more likely to dropout of school than their counterparts from families with small family size. According to Rutter (1990) cited in Otunge (2004), large family size is quite strongly associated with socio-economic disadvantage. Rutter further indicated that there is probably less intensive interaction and less communication between the

parents and children in large families, parental time has to be distributed widely. This limits parental involvement in the academic welfare of each child which leads to low participation of the child in school activities and may eventually lead to dropout. Otunge (2004) further states that parents with too many children often suffer financial hardship furthermore with rising household poverty levels, families with many children increasingly find it difficult to enroll their children in secondary school and those enrolled are likely to drop out.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The main goal of the study was to investigate the relationship between the socio economic factors of the family and students' retention rates in Public secondary schools in Tana River County. The study findings revealed that majority of the students dropping out of school were from families where parents had not attained formal education or had primary education. The study further established that most of these students were from families where parents were not employed and had large family size. This implies that parents' educational background and economic background had a significant effect on their children's education. However, it was established that gender of the household head did not have any significant influence on students' retention rates in school. Based on these findings, the study concludes that low education level of household heads, low income level and large family size negatively influences students' retention rates in school. In order to enhance students' access, retention and completion rates in schools, the study recommends that:

- i. The government through the Ministry of education should provide support to the needy students. This can be achieved through provision of enough bursaries as well as teaching and learning resources.
- ii. School principals should ensure that they are aware of the needy students in their schools to ensure that they benefit from other sources of the government funds such as CDF and CBF bursaries.
- iii. More research should be conducted to find out the impact of parents socioeconomic status and students educational achievement.

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BIO- DATA

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